DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 298 270 CE 050 767

AUTHOR Banziger, George
TITLE "Teaching Old Dogs New Tricks": The ELDERSCHOLAR Program.
PUB DATE 24 Sep 88
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Ohio-West Virginia Adult Education Conference (Marietta, OH, September 24, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; *Adult Programs; *Community Education; *Enrichment Activities; *Noncredit Courses; *Older Adults; Student Interests
IDENTIFIERS *Elderscholar Program

ABSTRACT

The Elderscholar program was initiated in Marietta, Ohio, in the spring of 1988 as a special noncredit program for learners over the age of 55. Ten courses (two at each of five time slots) were offered for 50-minute periods on six consecutive Fridays. Courses were offered in creative writing, religions of the world, modern literature, microcomputers, Marietta (Ohio) history, travel options, drawing, antiques and collectibles, financial planning, and health and nutrition. Topics were based on a survey completed by over 200 older adults. Community members who had been identified as experts on these topics served as instructors. Despite limited publicity, the Elderscholar classes attracted 40 enrollees. Ninety-four percent of those who participated in the classes indicated that they would participate in the program again. The program is being offered twice during the 1988-89 academic year. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED298270

"Teaching Old Dogs New Tricks:" The ELDERSCHOLAR Program

Dr. George Banziger

Dean of Continuing Education

Marietta College, Marietta, OH 45750-3031

Paper presented at the Ohio-West Virginia Adult Education Conference

Marietta, OH, September 24, 1988.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D Banziger

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE050767

"Teaching Old Dogs New Tricks:" The ELDERSCHOLAR Program

George Banziger, Ph.D.

Summary

Elderscholar was initiated in spring 1988 as a special non-credit program for learners over 55 years of age and consisted of ten courses (two at each of five time slots) offered for 50-minute periods for six consecutive Fridays. Course topics were: creative writing, religions of the world, modern literature, microcomputers, Marietta history, travel options, beginning drawing, antiques/collectibles, financial planning, and health/nutrition. All instructors were community persons who are identified experts on these topics. Although publicity was limited, 40 persons enrolled in these Elderscholar classes. Evaluation of the program was very positive with 94% saying that they would participate again. Two short stories written for the creative writing class were published in the 1988 issue of the college literary journal. The program is being offered twice during the 1988-89 academic year.

"Teaching Old Dogs New Tricks:" The ELDERSCHOLAR Program

Background

The Office of Continuing Education at Marietta College has been committed to providing educational programs for older (over 55) learners for over ten years. During that time several summer sessions for seniors have been held each year as part of the nationally organized residential Elderhostel program. For the past three years Marietta College has enrolled the largest number of Elderhostelers of any Ohio campus.

Local interest in Elderhosteling and the establishment of similar programs on other campuses throughout the country have stimulated a need for learning experiences for older learners who want to commute to their local college campus. Cuyahoga Community College in the Cleveland area has run a program called "Elders' Campus" for several years, enrolling hundreds of seniors in on-campus and off-campus educational programs of non-credit courses. The University of Akron has conducted a similar program called "College Emeritus."

There are currently 52 million people over 55 in the U.S., representing 21% of the population. These percentages are even higher for West Virginia and Ohio. The absolute number and the percentage of those in the senior age categories is growing. As more affluent and well-educated cohorts approach age 55, we shall see even greater interest in college-based learning opportunities in this age group. The senior citizen of the future will not be content to sit passively in a rocking chair and disengage from society, but will seek continued involvement, new intellectual challenges, and even new careers after age 55.

Gerontological research has indicated that in the normal older person intellectual capacity is intact, particularly for crystallized, i.e., verbal,

intelligence, which is that skill usually required in the college classroom. Not only is the older student capable of learning in the classroom setting, but such a student brings a wealth of life experience, appreciation for the opportunity of being in a college class, and a desire for active participation, which is highly motivating to an instructor. The major barrier for most seniors is overcoming negative stereotypes about aging and the widely held, outdated assumption that college is just for young people.

Preliminary Activity

In the fall of 1987 a survey was conducted in the Marietta-Parkersburg area to determine what topics such older learners would prefer in a college setting of non-credit, short courses. This survey was administered to groups of retired teachers, local chapters of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), and to gatherings at senior centers in the area.

Over 200 surveys were completed and returned. Greatest interest was shown in courses on elementary drawing, local history, literature, and travel. The preferred format was one day of classes (as opposed to two) per week over a period of about six weeks.

An ad-hoc advisory group for the program was established after the survey results were obtained . This group was composed of prominent older people in the community who were familiar with educational matters and the needs of seniors. They included a college trustee, retired teachers, and AARP members.

Program Description

With these survey data in mind a series of ten courses were arranged to be

presented in five time slots from 10:00 a.m. till 4:00 p.m. on six consecutive Fridays starting in late February. The classes were: creative writing, religions of the world, modern literature, microcomputers for beginners, beginning drawing, travel options, Marietta history, antiques, financial planning, and health/nutrition. All instructors were local community experts in these fields (no college faculty were used).

Compensation for instructors was $120 each. No instructor refused this offer or demanded more; two instructors said that they would have done it for nothing. It should be noted that in other similar programs representatives of travel agencies and of financial institutions often present such courses without any compensation under the assumption that they will reap some business from the contact with such an active, affluent group.

Publicity was limited to the publication of a single-page flyer describing the course offerings and other details, one newspaper advertisement, appearances on radio and television talk shows by the dean of continuing education, and targeted mailings to membership lists of local AARP, NRTA, and other groups with predominantly seniors as their constituency.

Participants were told they could enroll for five courses at a tuition fee of $50. There was no pro-rated tuition for less than five courses. A total of forty persons enrolled in this first offering of the Elderscholar program.

Evaluation

A structured evaluation form was used to assess the participants' impressions of the courses and the program. The participants were asked, among other items, to rate each course in general from 1 to 4, 1 being the highest possible rating. The average rating of all courses was 1.4; three courses

received a perfect rating of 1.00; 94% of the participants said that they would enroll in a similar program again. Elaborated comments were also very favorable, expressing an appreciation for the opportunity and for the efforts of the instructors. The only criticisms related to the limited number of microcomputers available for the class size and the short length (50 minutes of the class period).

One of the most notable indicators of the success of the program was the submission and acceptance of two short stories from the creative-writing class to the Marietta College literary journal Pulse, which printed these stories in the 1988 issue. All of the stories and poems written by the students of the creative writing class were collected and arranged in an anthology, which was later distributed to all the members of the class.

Following is a summary of the major costs of the program:

Instruction -	$1200
Flyer -	75
Newspaper ad -	155
Staff time	?
Total:	$1430 (Direct Costs)

Total income was $2,000.

Fall 1988 Version

Due to the success of this program, it was decided to present a similar series of courses during the fall semester of 1988 in addition to an anticipated

spring offering.

In response to evaluative comments the class periods were extended from 50 minutes to 75 minutes each. Maximal class size in the microcomputer class was reduced to 15, and a $10 lab fee was added. Course topics were reduced to seven with two sections of creative writing offered. The instructor compensation was raised to $150, and the tuition was increased to $60 per student for four courses. Eight classes were offered in four time slots: creative writing (2 sections), religions of the Middle East, cholesterol and health, microcomputers for beginners, auctions/collectibles, Marietta history, and literature and politics. The courses topics were chosen to attract some new participants but also to continue the themes of the previous offering of the program for returning participants.

As with the spring offering, the classes were run on six successive Fridays beginning on September 23. The arrangement of publicity was similar to that of the spring offering with the addition of distribution of the flyer to the largest churches in the area. The starting date was chosen because it was two and half weeks after the beginning of the fall semester for the continuing education program of Marietta College.

Ramifications of the Program

A major benefit of the program was the good will created for the college among senior citizens of the area. Because of the college's reputation for quality, some of the most prominent retired people in the area participated in Elderscholar. The program was favorably described in meetings of the college's Board of Trustees and in other college/community settings.

Due to the unique success of the creative writing class, a special grant proposal was prepared and submitted to Artsbridge, a regional organization

dedicated to the promotion of arts and culture in the Marietta-Parkersburg area. Funds were requested in this proposal to support individual tutoring in creative writing for the most promising students in the creative writing class. Many of the stories submitted related to family and local history and serve to preserve the heritage of Marietta, the first settlement in the Northwest Territory. The tutor in this program will be the instructor of the Elderscholar class on creative writing. At this writing no decision had yet been reached regarding this proposal.

Another grant proposal emanated from the course on religions of the Middle East. This proposal was a peace initiative submitted to the Diocese of Southern Ohio of the Episcopal Church and requested funds to assist in setting up a community program to study conflict resolution of the struggle for Palestinian autonomy and Israeli security. Local labor-management leaders, other professionals involved in conflict resolution, and another Elderscholar class on religions in the Middle East will be invited to this program if the grant is received. The instructor of the Elderscholar course on religions of the Middle East and the dean of continuing education will be leaders of this program. No decision has been reached on this proposal at this date.

The Elderscholar program is a low-cost, highly beneficial program for promoting good relations between senior citizens of the community and the college and for demonstrating that older learners are capable of productivity and creativity in the classroom.